Sirhan Past Remembered in Mixture of Fragments

Varied, Isolated Impressions Given

By JACK SHREIBMAN

LOS ANGELES (AP) — He was a gentleman all the way . . . a good worker . . . he could hate . . . had had compassion . . . a curious, nervous little guy . . . very respectful . . . he could not take orders easily. . . .

Such is the strange mixture of opinions of some of the people who knew Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, accused of assassinating Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and scheduled to enter a plea June 28.

From his closely-guarded cell in Central Jail there has come no clue to the 24-year-old Jordanian national's thoughts or actions, recent or past. But continuous checking by newsmen has located a number of people who have known him.

Sirhan showed differing facets of himself to different people, and their conclusions sound like the fable of the blind men who thought they knew what an elephant looked like — each man depending on what part he touched.

Sirhan was born March 18, 1944, to Mary and Bishara Sirhan. He was the fourth of five boys. There was one daughter. They lived in Jerusalem, where the father for 28 years had been the senior Arab officer in charge of the city water supply under British mandate rule.

LUTHERAN SCHOOL

Their rented house was in the Armenian sector of the ancient Walled City. For generations the family had been of the Greek Orthodox faith. However, young Sirhan and his brothers went to a school run by the Lutheran Church of the Savior.

Arab sources said Sirhan is a Moslem name, Bishara a Christian one.

In 1957, as part of a broad program to aid Arab refugees, 12-year-old Sirhan came to America with his mother, father, sister and two brothers. Two other brothers followed a few months later.

They settled in Pasadena, a few miles from Los Angeles, under sponsorship of two members of the First Nazarene Church and the First Baptist Church.

Sirhan's mother gave him a nickname—"Saul." He entered Longfellow Elementary School in the sixth grade.

Frank Celis Jr., now 23, who knew Sirhan at school, recalls "He was a very hard worker after school—sold papers, swept out a coffee shop nearby. He came over to my house a lot to play with me. My parents tried often to have me behave like him, he was so polite."

—AP WIREPHOTO.

STANDING in the doorway of his gun store in San Gabriel, Calif., the Lock, Stock & Barrel, Ben Herrick (right), 42, tells newsmen Saturday that he sold four boxes of ammunition on June 1 to three men, one of them Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, the man accused of murdering Sen. Robert F. Kennedy on June 5. Lloyd Hager (left) shows newsmen the target room of the San Gabriel Valley Gun Club in nearby Duarte where a Grand Jury witness testified he had seen Sirhan practicing shooting the day of the assassination. Hager is manager of the gun club.

SCHOOL GRADUATE

In 1963, Sirhan was graduated from John Muir High School, a member of his senior class council.

"Saul," at 20, was scrawny, wiry, his 115 pounds hung on a 5-foot-5 frame. He was, above all, a quiet fellow.

Through the years after their arrival in this country, the Sirhans—except the father who returned to Jordan shortly after his arrival in the United States—attended one church after another.

In his early teens, Sirhan went to Sunday school and youth group meetings of the First Baptist Church, but he complained to his mother about the frivolity of American children.

Dr. Ben T. Cowes, director of counseling service of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, where Mary Sirhan was em-

ployed in the nursery school, said the boy "felt you go to church to pray and read the Bible."

For several years the family attended the First Baptist Church, the Rev. Charles B. Bell Jr., reported.

WORKS AT STATION

In September, 1964, Sirhan went to work for Jack Davies at a service station about 10 minutes from the center of Pasadena.

"He was a real good worker," said Davies. "In fact, I'd hire him again. He was very polite, courteous, attentive."

He said Sirhan liked to bet on the horses at Santa Anita race track.

After 10 months, Sirhan left because, Davies said, Sirhan refused to take the needling he got from a supervisor.

Sirhan took a job about 50 yards away at Ivan Milicic's service station. After a few weeks, Sirhan showed up with a bundle of money from what he said was a lucky strike at Santa Anita. He quit.

"He was honest and hard-working," said Milicic. "If he would come to ask for a job, I would rehire him. Very respectful. Yes. No. Thank you. Please."

Sirhan took a job about a block away with William Beveridge, an elderly gardener.

SHOWS RESPECT

"He was a gentleman all the way," Mrs. Beveridge recalled. "He showed every respect, more than that."

His job was watering plants and doing little odds and ends. He quit after a few months.

Sirhan's home is a one-story white, wood-frame house in a middle class Pasadena neighborhood. Oleanders, magnolias and tall fan palms dot the 600 block of E. Howard Street. Neighbors speak well of Sirhan.

Sirhan's next-door neighbor, Olive Blakeslee, called Sirhan her "Chinese checker chum" because of the many times he played the game with her and her friends.

Anita, Sirhan's sister who died of cancer in 1966, called her brother "the brains of the family," Mrs. Blakeslee said.

The California Horse Racing Board reported that he was licensed in 1965 and 1966 to cool off horses after runs, and as an exercise boy. He had no record of arrests. Reports said he exercised horses at Hollywood Park or Santa Anita or both.

FALLS FROM HORSE

On Sept. 24, 1966, Sirhan fell from a speeding horse on a ranch near Corona. He was admitted the same day to Corona Community Hospital and discharged the next day.

Dr. Paul Nilsson of Corona, who treated Sirhan, said he had complained that his eyesight was affected by the fall, but Nilsson said three doctors could find no evidence of injury.

Nevertheless, the State Workmen's Compensation Appeals Board awarded Sirhan a $2,000 settlement four months ago on the ground that the accident had affected his eyesight.

Sirhan's mother said of the accident:

"He didn't seem to be hurt too bad, I mean physically. But he changed somehow. After that accident, we seemed not so close any more. I couldn't even get through to him when we talked."

His closest relationships with persons outside his family apparently came during the six months he worked at Organic-Pasadena, a health foods store from Sept. 1967 to March 1968 as a helper for Mr. and Mrs. John H. Weidner. Weidner is a World War II veteran who says he was involved in the Dutch-Paris underground, rescuing nearly 1,000 Jews from German hands. Mrs. Weidner remembers, "He was quiet with us, but friendly with the employes. He had a lot of pride, a lot of arrogance. We were always careful how we gave him an order."

VERY RESENTFUL

"If you gave him an order he didn't like, he became very resentful," she said.

Once, Mrs. Weidner said, she saw Sirhan flirting with a girl employe. Mrs. Weidner said to herself, "I'm glad he's normal."

Weidner, a barrel-chested, ruddy-faced man, with a French accent, said Sirhan "wanted to be equal to you. But I had to be the boss. He was a proud man with a good opinion of himself. I always had the impression he was what I would classify as an anarchist ... his mind, his reaction to our society, our life.

Weidner told Sirhan that America was a country where democratic processes were used to obtain improvements. "He told me, 'No, in America, freedom does not exist.' He told me he was in favor of the Negroes. He would say, 'I agree with the violence.'"

"He had this feeling of hate against society," Weidner said. "But the biggest question was the Jews. Here was a real hatred for people. He said the Jewish people were rich and had taken his country so he was very angry against them."

When Sirhan was arrested after the shooting June 5, police said they found on him a newspaper column in which Kennedy was quoted as speaking favorably of Israel.

TOLD TO PRAY

Weidner said he pleaded with Sirhan to forgive the Jews and forget, and if he could not, to pray to the Lord for help. Weidner is an elder of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. But he said, Sirhan told him:

"'There is no God. You see in Israel what happens to the Arab. There is no God. How can you have a God?'"

Mrs. Totsey Boyko, a clerk in the store, said she often talked with Sirhan because he felt he could "communicate" with her. She said the country he admired most was Russia.

"He thought Russia was the best," Mrs. Boyko said, adding that she thought, but was not certain, that Sirhan spoke a little Russian.